



Moments of Truth: The Future of the Customer Experience

By Charles Araujo

In 1955, something happened in California that would change how we approach the world of IT some sixty years later. That year, Walt Disney unleashed his spectacular vision on the world in the form of Disneyland. It was unlike anything the world had seen before. Disneyland had a visceral effect on people. We were able to escape the reality of day-to-day life and enter a special world in which everything was good and we could imagine the world as it should and could be. It was, as Walt said, “the happiest place on earth.”

The opening of Disneyland was a watershed moment for the entertainment and theme-park industries, but it also set into motion an idea that would eventually permeate every facet of life in the western world—an idea that is now having a significant impact on us as IT professionals. Ignore it at your peril, because it will come to define everything about how we work going forward: People don’t buy a product. They buy an *experience*.

Before Walt opened the doors to the Magic Kingdom, there was no real concept of the *engineered customer experience*; people simply bought products. Likewise, while a more robust sense of service began to develop during the 1940s and ‘50s, that was more a factor of culture than intent. But Disneyland wasn’t just a product with great service. From top to bottom, it was designed to create exactly the experience that Walt himself envisioned that you have. That vision was so powerful, in fact, that it’s still almost exactly what we experience today when we visit the Disney parks.

Walt was right. People loved the idea of purchasing an *experience*.

They loved buying the feeling they got when they crossed the threshold and stepped onto Main Street. People loved it so much, in fact, that they began to seek similar experiences. Today, whether it’s the Harley Davidson store, a themed restaurant, or the Apple Store, people want experiences, and they’re rewarding those organizations that can deliver them. And thanks to Apple, Google, and many other consumer technology companies, people are now looking for the same type of experience from their IT organizations. Welcome to your future.

Our World Has Changed

In *The Quantum Age of IT: Why Everything You Know About IT Is About to Change* (2012), I describe three market forces that I believe have changed the world of IT for good. One of these is what we now call the “consumerization of IT.” This is the idea that as consumer technologies have become more pervasive, they’ve changed our customers’ perceptions about how they should be able to interact with both their technology and their service providers.

In the world of IT, that’s us.

Our customers’ view of us and how we should interact with them has evolved, and it’s forever changed our relationship with them. The challenge is that, in many cases, we haven’t realized it. It’s why so many organizations are scratching their heads trying to figure out why their customers seem to be less and less satisfied with their services each year, even though they feel as though the quality of their services is getting better. Perceptions have changed. Relationships have changed. The rules are different.

The problem is that organizations still believe they’re delivering a service (i.e., a product), but their customers are actually buying experiences.

The Customer Equation

One of the Four Pillars of IT Transformations is something we call *the customer equation*. It's a simple construct, and it goes like this:

If you want to have a positive, trusting, and productive relationship with your customer, you need to be focused on two things: delivering customer value and delivering a positive customer experience.

Having a happy customer means solving for both parts of this equation. Are you delivering the value that you promised? Are they getting something from their IT investment that's meaningful to their business? That's the first half of the equation. And in many cases, it's the only part IT organizations ever focus on.

The challenge is that, as IT professionals and as service providers, we're no longer judged solely by the value of our services (and I'm not sure we ever were). We're also not judged by some discreet element of a service transaction. We're judged by the totality of our customer's interaction with us—and, increasingly, the shared experience with other customers. Our customers have come to expect a total customer experience. And they're going to get it, one way or the other. So you'd better understand what it looks like.

The Four Moments of Truth in the Customer Experience

The good news is that you implicitly understand what the customer experience is all about. Why? Because when you put on your “consumer hat,” you most likely have the same expectations; for example, a restaurant can have great food, but if the service and ambiance are lacking, you probably won't return. We've all come to expect a complete customer experience, but you may not have given much thought as to how that experience is actually put together.

In *What's the Future of Business* (2013), Brian Solis identifies what he calls the Four Moments of Truth that define the complete customer experience. It's important to understand each of these Moments of Truth as you contemplate your role in IT service delivery.

- **The Zero Moment of Truth (Discovery):** Coined by Google, the very first moment of truth is when a customer has an unmet need and is seeking a solution. They begin to search for potential options and alternatives.
- **The First Moment of Truth (Exploration):** Coined by Proctor & Gamble, the second step of the experience is the one in which the customer actually interacts with you and/or your product or service. What is their first impression? Does the product speak to their needs?
- **The Second Moment of Truth (Consumption):** Also coined by Proctor & Gamble, the third step of the experience is after the customer has elected to purchase your product or service and is now using it and experiencing it. This moment lasts as long as the customer is engaged with the product.

- **The Ultimate Moment of Truth (Shared Engagement):** Coined by Solis, the final (or “ultimate”) moment of truth is when customers share their experience with others who are often experiencing their own Zero Moments. This influence loop generates a powerful force of either growth or destruction, depending on how positive or negative the customer's experience has been.

These Moments of Truth were obviously developed from a marketing perspective and were designed to explain the process by which people make purchasing decisions. So you may be thinking, *What does this have to do with IT?* But the truth is that in this new era of IT, our customers *have choices*, and they're making purchasing decisions every time they choose to deal with us. When you look at our industry, at the business of providing IT services, you'll see that virtually all of our efforts are invested in the Second Moment of Truth, the experience customers have with our product or service. But their experience with us starts long before that moment.

The first point at which the customer begins to form opinions about any organization is when they don't even know it exists, when they're only focused on the problem they're facing, not the solution (the Zero Moment of Truth). IT's customers are in the same situation. They have problems, and they want to know who else has faced the same problems. They're looking for paths that might lead them to solutions. Are you even involved in that conversation? That's where the customer experience begins, and IT must learn to engage at that stage.

Once customers are ready to engage with us, even if they didn't have a choice in the matter, we face the second stage of the customer experience: the First Moment of Truth. During that very first interaction, when a customer is simply trying to find a solution, when they're exploring your products or services and trying to understand how you can help them, what kind of an impression are you making at that moment? Have you ever tried to request or acquire one of your own products or services? Was the process simple? Intuitive? Personal? Human? As IT professionals, we need to treat this second stage of the customer experience as if our careers depended on it—because it does. If customers find it difficult to do business with us, they'll simply go elsewhere. So, how are you designing the process by which your customers can explore your products or services and then actually acquire them? (If you think it's as simple as implementing a self-service service catalog, you're in for a very rude awakening in the not-too-distant future.)

The third stage of the customer experience (the Second Moment of Truth) is where we spend most of our time: the actual consumption and use of the product or service we're delivering and the customer's experience with that process. The challenge we often have in IT is that we believe the different elements of the actual service delivery can be isolated and are experienced or evaluated independently. They can't and aren't. You can ask me how my experience was when I called the service desk, and if the agent was friendly and solved my problem, I may tell you that

my experience was good. But that doesn't mean that I'm happy. If I have to call every week because the service isn't reliable, or because an application was designed poorly and is making me work twice as hard as I should have to, or if everything runs slowly, or if...you get the idea. My *real experience* with the consumption and use of a product or service is the totality of those isolated events. I don't separate the pieces in my head, and neither do you. None of us do. Yet what do we do in IT? We ask our customers about just one small slice of their experience with a service or product's delivery, and then we wonder why those responses don't seem to line up with the complaints we hear.

This leads us to the Ultimate Moment of Truth: the shared experience. Solis's point was simply that we are becoming increasingly comfortable with sharing our experiences with others and basing decisions on those shared experiences. When was the last time you chose a new restaurant without first checking out the reviews on Yelp, UrbanSpoon, or TripAdvisor? This type of social community exists within and between our organizations as well, in person and online. What are you doing to create open opportunities for these shared experiences, so that you can learn from them and engage in the conversation? We must recognize that these conversations and shared experiences will have a massive effect on our customers' experience with us. You can't fight it, but you *can* create an open platform for these conversations; you can listen, you can engage, and you *can* make those shared experiences more positive.

Your Future IS the Experience

As IT professionals, this conversation about the customer experience and Moments of Truth may feel odd and uncomfortable. You're in IT, not marketing, right? The truth is, as we move into the new era of IT, it will be all about the experience. You simply cannot afford to ignore this reality: Every moment of every day, before you ever even interact with them, you're a part of your customer's experience with the IT organization. You need to realize it, remember it, and then ask yourself, *What can I be doing right now to improve the customer experience at each Moment of Truth?*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Araujo is the founder and CEO of The IT Transformation Institute and author of *The Quantum Age of IT: Why Everything You Know About IT Is About to Change* (2012). An expert in the areas of IT transformation and IT organizational change, Charles is the creator of DeepRoots, an organizational change methodology for IT teams. He also serves on the boards of itSMF USA and The Executive Next Practices Institute, is a regular contributor to *CIO Insight*, and has been quoted or published in *ZDNet*, *IT Business Edge*, *TechRepublic*, *SupportWorld*, *Computerworld*, *USA Today*, and *Time*.



Health Check: The Challenge of Mobility

By Heidi Cook

Thousands of people pass through Floyd Medical Center facilities every year: patients, families, staff, and physicians, all of whom either want or need to access their data and applications whether they're on the hospital grounds or at one of the surrounding campuses. The growing mobility trend presents many challenges for IT management and staff in the healthcare field, and government regulations (plus the hefty fines that result from violating those regulations) ensure that patient privacy is at the top of everyone's minds when developing mobile solutions.

Whether it's a doctor who wants to review a patient's record on her iPad or a patient who wants to check Facebook while waiting for his lab results to come back, the FMC network is accessed thousands of times each day. The challenge is segmenting that user